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One Look Is Worth a Thousand Words:
Effectiveness of Video for Learning about Textile and Apparel Social Responsibility

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Background. More than any other industry, apparel companies have been linked to human rights violations and loss of human lives (Pedersen & Gwozdz, 2014). Further, continuously increasing production and consumption of textile-based goods resulted in alarming impacts on environment through agricultural and manufacturing pollution, consumer care for the products, and huge amount of waste (Kunz, Karpova, & Garner, 2016). As a result, social responsibility (SR) has received much attention from both textile and apparel businesses and consumers. SR is a complex and multifaceted concept and can be defined as an incorporation of “an orientation encompassing the environment and its people, a philosophy balancing ethics/morality with profit, and an emphasis on the business actions and strategies resulting in positive outcomes for people and the environment” (Dickson & Eckman, 2006, p. 178).

Purpose. To practice socially responsible behavior, one needs to understand the broader concept of SR, which is not only from business perspective but also consumer and society perspectives (Yurchisin, Chang, & Childs, 2015). The complexity of the concept makes learning about SR crucial for future academic and industry professionals. Video has been used as an effective educational tool to increase student knowledge of sustainability in the apparel industry (Baytar & Ashdown, 2014). Specifically, the video had a significant impact on students’ motivation to change consumption behavior as well as to enhance their understanding of sustainability. The purpose of this study was to examine effectiveness of a single learning assignment (watching a video) on student understanding of SR in the textile and apparel industry. Three research questions guided the study: (1) What issues students perceive as SR problems in the industry, (2) How students’ definitions of SR differ before and after watching the video, and (3) How students’ SR related attitudes changed after watching the video.

Method. Research participants were junior and senior college students ($N = 61$) majoring in apparel. Data were collected through written responses to open-ended questions. In an in-class learning activity, students were asked to describe SR in their own words before and after watching “The True Cost,” a documentary, which is praised by critics as an eye-opening story that scrutinizes issues in the fashion industry (Gustafson, 2015). While students were watching the video, they were asked to list SR problems presented in the documentary. Data were analyzed through a mixed method approach: (1) Categories and themes were identified using the constant comparison method, and (2) Word frequency in participants responses was examined to inform the conclusions of the qualitative analysis.

Results. Participants identified a wide range of issues that they perceived as SR problems in the textile and apparel industry. Major identified problems were classified in three categories: (1) working conditions, such as low wages and safety issues, (2) environmental pollution, and (3) textile waste and landfills. More than the third of students recognized social and cultural aspects contributing to SR issues, including overconsumption, and the role of advertising contributing to consumerism. The scope of students' understanding of SR went beyond the identified problems. Before watching the video, students described SR as mostly a business/industry responsibility. The definitions generally focused on the industry and companies' responsibility to improve working condition and care about the environment. Watching the video helped students understand the important role of consumers in contributing to many SR issues in the industry. After watching the video, SR was often described as a personal or collective responsibility. For example, quotes such as "I as a consumer" or "we as a society" were used. Several students emphasized their role of future industry professionals in addressing these SR issues.

Conclusions and Implications. The research findings contribute to our knowledge about effectiveness of a learning activity (watching a video) in student understanding of a complex concept such as SR. The results indicate that learning through videos is an effective instructional strategy, supporting conclusion by Baytar and Ashdown (2014). Specifically, completing the learning activity substantially enhanced students' knowledge of a wide range of issues related to SR. Furthermore, students' attitudes toward SR have shifted significantly after watching the video: In addition to responsibilities on the part of companies and industry overall, students realized the role of individual consumers and society as a whole. The results demonstrate that not only knowledge but also attitudes and intentions can be affected by learning through video. The findings of the study have implications for educational professionals, particularly, in the context of teaching and learning SR.

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